**What does Alejandro Portes (2000) mean by the "hidden abode" in research on educational policy implementation? Choose one of the following areas of federal or state policy in the U.S. (assessment and accountability, charter schools, OR the hiring of qualified teachers) and discuss challenges to policy implementation. For the policy that you selected, what are some examples of school organizational conditions (e.g., levels of social capital or relational trust) that lead to skepticism about the routine implementation of linear relationships?**

The democratic ideology of education has been fundamental to the development and emergence of common schooling. Efforts to democratize education have expanded throughout the public school system on the premise that citizens should be trained to serve the egalitarian ideal. This movement has surfaced in federal and state policies to teach students how to be productive citizens in a diverse society. The implementation of No Child Left Behind, War on Poverty, Race to the Top, and progression toward National Curriculum Standards demonstrates the belief that equality of opportunity and democratic responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Consequently, democratic fervor in schooling coupled with political ideology has resulted in the impetuous movement toward school choice with consequences that have yet to be determined. Dewey’s (1916) philosophy of the democratic conception of education contends “the democratic ideal of education is farcical yet delusional yet the ideal more and more dominants our public system of education” (Dewey, 1916). The false portrayal of a purely democratic society has abandoned the notion of equality and opportunity for choice and competition.

The charter school movement in the late 21st century has advanced to an outgrowth of power, privilege, and educational necessity. With the first charter school legislation in Minnesota in 1991, the movement has been characterized as educationally unjust and politically divisive. Charter advocates contend the need to allow the freedom of the market and competition to drive equality in schooling. Choice through charter has been viewed as the “best way to fix problems” (Hess, 1999). Schools are given the “freedom” to hire or fire teachers, are challenged by fewer curriculum constraints, free to innovation, have greater accountability, avoid governmental regulation, and can accept private resources. Ideologies that drive charter school advocates as described by Levin (2008) contend four aspects. First, there is freedom of choice. This choice opens educational opportunities and social capital for individual academic growth. Second, choice leads to productive efficiency. Productive efficiency will lead to market competition and improve overall school efficiency. Third, students will be able to choose equality based on the school that offers an attractive educational agenda. Fourth, social cohesion will be achieved through the training of students to be part of society. Chubb & Moe contend there is a “lack of incentive for schools and government to improve; the goal of public schools and teachers is not good enough” (Chubb & Moe, 1990). However, growing opposition to this belief has examined the role of choice through charter as a disservice to the educational progression of youth.

Opposition to the charter school movement contends that choice policy implementation leads to further inequality because of issues of feasibility, equity, and an exodus from the public school system. Issues of feasibility emerge in the fundamental implementation of charter schools and their varying forms. Specifically, there are divergent forms of charter schools that require different methods of accountability and regulatory action. Types of choice include: charter, voucher, home school, and for-profit private (Levin, 2008). These various types of choice will require resources that may extend outside of the control of “the citizenry”. Given that choice is often dictated through governing agencies rather than the entity of public schools, requires an active management process that is vastly different from the current structure. It is apparent that “pragmatic privatization is selective and allocates responsibility for the common good while systemic privatization involves rearrangement of authority powered by forces, thus the consequences of school choice are impossible to control or predict” (Henig, 2005). Choice is viewed as a step to a school system that disengages education.

Another consideration that challenges the implementation of choice through charter is the feasibility of transportation and the admissions process. For students that lack the financial and social capital to attend a choice school they will be grossly excluded from this educational option. Furthermore, the admissions criteria may serve to systematically exclude some students at the expense of others. Choice could dominate education but consequently could exclude through the number of available seats, requirements for parent involvement, or location within a district. In rural districts a choice plan may not be economically feasible or educationally viable as well.

A second challenge to the implementation of choice is issues of equity. Opponents of the choice movement argue choice may lead to a “full private system of education that would tend to exacerbate class differences” (Friedman, 1962). The social economic status of students would be an indicator to the “type” and “degree” or choice available. This would increase current educational inequalities that exist at the expense of maintaining a false notion of democracy. Productive efficiency could “create competition for only the best students” while “generating greater inequality when parents are uninformed because the lack of perfect information” (Levin, 2008). Comparatively, social cohesion would fail to exist due to “differentiation which results in specializing that takes away from a common experience” (Levin, 2008). This common experience will reduce the degree of a shared learning experience that will be inclusive of diverse student needs. The major questions that arise are: Whose choice will matter and who is choosing? Ensuring equality is a difficult goal to achieve especially when it is at the expense of opportunity. Proponents of choice argue that equality can be achieved through choice without addressing issues of access. Carnoy (1996) notates that “studies suggest equalizing access to equal quality of education may not be enough to equalize opportunities in the labor market with labor market conditions affecting disadvantaged groups’ willingness to take more and better available education” (Carnoy, 1996). Choice could perpetuate a cyclical pattern of equality minus quality in school and ultimately the workforce.

The final challenge to the implementation of choice is issues of exodus from the public school system. This challenge can dramatically affect the type of teachers and administrators that manage our educational system. The byproduct of choice by charter becomes reduction in school population, parental satisfaction with underperforming schools, or a teaching population that exits the system. Jacobson (2009) contends that exit, voice, and loyalty will be used by parents and students in their reaction to choice programs. Parents that are dissatisfied with the public school system will simply exit. In comparison, some parents will voice their concerns while others will remain loyal. This could also result in the exit or voice of dissatisfied teachers and administrators. However, the implications of choice is not in the choice itself but in the lost of social and cultural capital when parents and children leave the system. This is an unmeasured consequence. In Yongmei’s (2009) analysis of choice programs in Michigan, the findings suggest “charter school competition has a negative effect on student achievement and school efficiency in Michigan in the long-run” (Yongmei, 2009). Although this study showed a negative effect of charter schools on student achievement positive gains or a non-effect has been noted in North Carolina and Florida. Therefore, it becomes even more pervasive to contend that charter schools offer freedom when that freedom has not be statistically proven in research and the discourse remains at a stalemate on its effectiveness.

The lack of research-proven effectiveness on choice through charter is an indication of how school organizational conditions can lead to skepticism about the routine implementation of linear relationships. Several organizational issues directly affect this notion. First, this theory operates on the assumption of perfect information within schooling. This notion is fallacious in nature because parents and children exhibit divergent forms of cultural, human, social, and institutional capital that determine “what” information is available, the linguistic interpretation, and “for how long” the information is accessible. James Coleman’s examination of a closed network and the lack of intergenerational closure is a primary concern with choice. In Coleman’s analysis a closed network has various individuals that provide resources and information usable for the entire network. It is a description of an individual or groups’ social network. In contrast, a group that lacks intergenerational closure operates with information that may be misidentified or have incorrect assessments. Thus, parents or students that have a robust social network or the capital required to have the “perfect information” will. Those who do not, simply lose out. Another example of a school organizational condition that can lead to skepticism is the issue of institutionalized reform practices where reform itself becomes an issue. As with charter schools and reform in general “reform is always shaped, and often crippled, by fruits of past problem-solving” (Cohen & Neufeld, 1981). The institution of education as an organization is reminded of previous goals and purposes of schooling that failed to be met. Thus, another reform agenda that often enters through policy windows only serve to add complexity and confirm the dominant political agenda at the time.

Furthermore, the organization of schooling is not perfect. It requires reforms that are effective and that address the often conflicting purposes of schooling. Labaree (1997) notes that “incoherence in public education is a result of tensions surrounding these conflicting goals and values (Labaree, 1997). These conflicting depictions of the goal of education and what occurs inside classrooms is a byproduct of the changing composition of schooling. Bryk & Schneider’s examination of organic, contractual, and relational trust serve to address the notion that there is not a perfect school or organizational entity in education. The presence of organic trust allows students and parents to genuinely trust the institution of education regardless of charter or private format. The notion of contractual trust transitions into a collaborative agreement about what is expected and desirable for related stakeholders. A step further, relational trust is based on the cooperative involvement of stakeholders in the process of mediating desirable ends for all parties involved. However, relational trust walks on a thin line between responsibility and enforcement. The organization of schooling walks on this thin line an often crosses outside those boundaries and receives and unanticipated consequence-choice through charter.

The ideology behind choice through charter is fundamental to the need for the freedom of the market to take its toll. Consequently, this approach may fail to incorporate an imperative aspect that determines how charters can be effective verses ineffective institutions. This consideration is the influence of the hidden abode. Alejandro Portes (2000) introduces the concept of the “hidden abode” to define the ideology of the unexpected. Portes examines the unexplained answers and questions that are often overlooked by the typical researcher or educator that fails to holistically examine an issue. It is the unobvious methodology and approach for solving social and educational problems. In the context of choice through charter, researchers should begin to ask if charter or choice is hindering the academic growth of a subgroup of students. Is choice allowing everyone to choose? What is really choice? These questions seek to identify what Portes identifies as the “hidden abode”, the sociology of the unexpected. Comparably, research on educational policy implementation should analyze how the institution of education is working rather than ways that it is failing students. Instead of deficit thinking, the hidden abode seeks to encourage researchers to question the status quo by looking at unnoticed aspects rather than the apparent.

Ensuring democratic equality of education is one of the purposes of schooling that seeks to address citizenship training and equality. However, there are various measures for seeking this goal that are multifaceted in theory and practice. To ensure that this objective is met, it becomes more critical for educators and researchers to entice the hidden abode while redefining how policy development and implementation can overcome challenges of feasibility, equity, and exodus of students. This is not a simple goal. However, with innovative and critical thinking, fearlessness, and proactive strategies public school education can meet the needs of all students while aiding in the social welfare of the nation.

**Reference**

Dewey, J. (1916) The Democratic Conception in Education. Democracy and Education.

Carnoy (1996). Race, Gender, and the Role of Education in Earnings Inequality: An Introduction.

Chubb & Moe. (1990). Politics Markets and American Schools.

Cohen, D. & Neufeld, B. (1981). The Failure of High Schools and the Progress of Education. Daedalus 110.

Friedman (1962). Capitalism and Freedom.

Henig (2005). Understanding the Political Conflict over School Choice.

Hess (1999). Spinning the Wheels of Reform.

Jacobson, R. (2009). The Voice of the People in Education Policy. Handbook of Education Policy Research.

Labaree, D. (1997). Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals. American Educational Research Journal 34.

Levin, J. (2008). Issues in Educational Privatization. Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy.

Yongmei, N. (2009). The impact of charter schools on the efficiency of traditional public schools: Evidence from Michigan. Economics of Education Review.